

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEHRAN 7234

FROM CHARGE

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: IR, MASS, PFOR
SUBJ: TEAR GAS PURCHASES BY IRAN

1. I UNDERSTAND THE GOI HAS ORDERED ANOTHER SHIPMENT OF TEAR GAS AND THE PURCHASE IS BEFORE PM/MC AT THIS TIME. I REALIZE THAT THIS IS A SENSITIVE SUBJECT-AND RIGHTLY SO-IN VIEW OF OUR CONCERNS ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE POSSIBLE MISUSE OF POLICE FORCE AGAINST LEGITIMATE POLITICAL ACTIVITY. HOWEVER, IN LIGHT OF THE FOLLOWING CONSIDERATIONS I URGE THAT PROMPT APPROVAL OF THE SALE BE GRANTED.

2. I HAVE BEEN AT POST ABOUT THREE MONTHS AND HAVE RIGOROUSLY TRIED TO ASSESS THE POLITICAL SCENE AFRESH AND TO DISCARD AS FAR AS HUMANLY POSSIBLE PRECONCEPTIONS REACHED IN MY PREVIOUS ASSIGNMENT AS COUNTRY DIRECTOR FOR IRAN. THE MAJOR IMPRESSION OF THESE FEW MONTHS IS THAT THE POLITICAL PROCESS INDEED IS GOING THROUGH A SEA CHANGE: POLITICAL GROUPS OF A GREAT VARIETY-SOME RESPEONSIBLE, SOME QUITE IRRESPONSIBLE FROM ALMOST ANY POINT OF VIEW-HAVE FORMED AND ARE PUBLICLY ACTIVE; THE PRESS IS MUCH MORE FREE THAN IN THE PAST AND ITS REPORTING OF DEMONSTRATIONS, INVESTIGATIONS, CRITICISM OF THE GOVERNMENT, ETC., IS A REAL EYE OPENER; THE RASTIKHIZ PARTY ITSELF HAS BECOME A MULTI-GROUP
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(PARTY) ORGANIZATION; PERSONS ARRESTED IN DEMONSTRATIONS GO BEFORE CIVILIAN COURTS; ETC. THE CHANGE IS PALPABLE AND AS MANY OF MY IRANIAN FIRENDS ARE CONCERNED BY IT AS THERE ARE THOSE WHO WELCOME IT.

3. AFTER A PERIOD OF UNCERTAINTY THIS SPRING BECAUSE OF THE WIDESPREAD VIOLENCE IN QOM AND TABRIZ, THE SHAH

REMAINS CONVINCED THAT FURTHER LIBERALIZATION IS THE ONLY PATH TO FOLLOW. HE SPOKE QUITE ELOQUENTLY ON THIS RECENTLY WITH UNDER SECRETARY NEWSOM. I AM FULLY CONVINCED THAT HE IS VERY SERIOUS AND COMMITTED--IF EVENT PERMIT. HE HAS EMPHASIZED AS WELL THAT HE IS NOT GOING TO ALLOW MASSIVE PUBLIC VIOLENCE AND DISREGARD FOR THE LAW. HE BELIEVES DEEPLY THAT VIOLATION OF THE LAW, WITHOUT GOVERNMENT ACTION, AND A DISREGARD FOR THE RIGHTS OF OTHERS WILL SERIOUSLY WEAKEN THE FABRIC OF THE SOCIETY.

4. THE WEEKS AND MONTHS AHEAD ARE GOING TO BE DIFFICULT, AND VIOLENT DEMONSTRATIONS ARE ALMOST CERTAINLY GOING TO OCCUR. IN THE LAST FEW DAYS (SEPTELS) ONCE AGAIN A PATTEN HAS BEEN SET OF MEETINGS AT MOSQUES, FOLLOWED BY RAMPAGES BY THE ASSEMBLED FAITHFUL IN NEARBY AREAS WITH EXTENSIVE WILLFUL DESTRUCTION OF BANKS, CINEMAS, GOVERNMENT OFFICES, AUTOMOBILES, ETC.--ALL SYMBOLS OF "MODERNIZATION." SO FAR THE POLICE HAVE ATTEMPTED TO ACT WITH RESTRAINT-AS ORDERED FROM ABOVE-USING TEAR GAS EXTENSIVELY, BUT FORCED TO FIRE ON OCCASION. SEVERAL POLICEMEN HAVE BEEN KILLED BY THE MOBS-INCLUDING ONE IN QOM WHO REPORTEDLY WAS KILLED BY A HAND GRENADE THROWN BY A DEMONSTRATOR. POLICE MORALE IS GOING DOWN AND PATIENCE IS WEARING THIN. ALSO, INFLUENTIAL OFFICIALS WOULD PREFER-AND HAVE URGED-A
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TOUGH, FIRE-AT-WILL POLICY.

5. THE DENIAL OF TEAR GAS SALES WOULD SIMPLY PLAY INTO THE HANDS OF THIS SCHOOL OF THOUGHT WITHIN THE BEUAAUCRACY AND THOSE PROVOCATEURS IN THE OPPOSITION (INCLUDING EXTREMISTS OF BOTH HUES) WHO WOULD LIKE NOTHING MORE THAN TO STIMULATE HARSH POLICE REACTION. ALSO, DENYING TEAR GAS IS IN A SENSE A VOTE OF NO CONFIDENCE FOR THE SHAH'S AIM OF STEADY LIBERALIZATION WITHIN THE BOUNDS OF THE LAW.

6. TO SUGGEST THAT THE GOI TURN TO OTHER FOREIGN SOURCES FOR TEAR GAS IS IN OUR VIEW A COPOUT-AN UNSEEMLY UNWILLINGNESS ON OUR PART TO WORK WITH THE SHAH AND HIS OFFICIALS IN THE VERY TOUGH TASK OF MOVING THIS VIOLENCE-PRONE LAND TO A NEW POLITICAL PROCESS WHICH WILL LEAD, PERHAPS OVER A LONGER PERIOD, TO A MORE STABLE SOCIETY INVOLVING A GREATER MEASURE OF WELL-BEING AND INDIVIDUAL A(INCLUDING HUMAN) RIGHTS FOR MORE IRANIANS. THE LIBERALIZATION PROCESS HAS TO BE NURTURED DURING ITS DIFFICULT EARLY STAGES.
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